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## NOTES

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### A MISSING CHAPTER IN OUR WAR-LABOR POLICY

The President of the United States set forth the beginnings of a national war-labor policy in his proclamation of April 8, 1918. In this proclamation he gave official approval to the findings of the War Labor Conference Board and particularly to their statement of the "principles and policies to govern relations between workers and employers in war industries for the duration of the war." From that date it could properly be said that we had a national labor policy covering the following points:<sup>1</sup>

1. There should be no strikes or lock-outs during the war.
2. The right of either workers or employers to organize should not be interfered with, and neither party should use coercive measures with respect to union membership.
3. Existing conditions with reference to the open or closed shop should be maintained.
4. Established safeguards and regulations for the protection of the health and safety of workers should not be relaxed.
5. Women should receive equal pay for equal work and should not have tasks disproportionate to their strength.
6. Practices tending to limit production either by employers or workers should be discouraged.
7. Certain practices with reference to mobilization of labor should be encouraged.
8. The customs and practices of localities should be regarded in fixing wages, hours, and conditions of labor.
9. The right of all workers to a living wage which would insure the subsistence of the worker and his family in health and reasonable comfort should be recognized.

The various government departments accepted this statement of principles and policies as a constituent part of their labor programs. As time went on, however, it became apparent that not all of the situations which arose were adequately met. In particular there was no provision for the standardization of wages and working conditions in the various war industries, which came to be regarded as desirable by most persons concerned with the work of labor administration. In October, 1918,

<sup>1</sup>There was also a colorless utterance concerning hours of labor.

the President was asked to supplement his earlier proclamation. A document setting forth the points to be covered was approved by the Secretary of Labor and sent to the President with the request that it be issued as a second proclamation on labor policy. For reasons that are not known to the writer delay after delay occurred, and the armistice was finally signed without such proclamation having been made. The time has gone by when any unfortunate consequences could follow the publication of the document concerned. It is full of interest for students of the labor problem, in that it reveals (1) something of the conditions under which the wage-adjusting agencies of the government labored, and (2) the general principles upon which they came to agree<sup>1</sup> as a result of their operations.

The outstanding events connected with the development of the document are as follows. A decision covering wages, hours, and working conditions for the shipbuilding plants of the entire country had been prepared by the Shipbuilding Labor Adjustment Board in August, 1918. The members of the Board realized that the promulgation of this decision might disrupt labor conditions in the metal-trades industries of our railroads and munition plants. It was accordingly desirable that opportunity should be given to other wage-adjusting agencies to consider the feasibility of establishing national standards of wages and working conditions in our war industries. It had, of course, been the expectation that the War Labor Policies Board would lead the way in the establishment of such standards. That Board had at various times discussed the standardization of wages of common labor, the standardization of wages of building-trades workers, and the standardization of wages of metal-trades workers outside of shipyards. But the activities of the War Labor Policies Board had, after all, been characterized by much talk and little performance.

The situation seemed to the members of the Shipbuilding Labor Adjustment Board sufficiently acute to justify disregarding the theoretical position of the War Labor Policies Board and to justify an attempt to cut through the difficulties involved and secure an elaboration of our national labor policy. They accordingly asked for a conference with the President and laid the entire situation before him. He requested the Board to withhold publication of its decision pending his securing, through the Secretary of Labor, action looking toward uniformity of policy of the various wage-adjustment agencies of the government.

<sup>1</sup>The representatives of the War Labor Board did not sign the document. That Board felt that it must be guided by local conditions in arriving at its decisions.

The details of the way in which these agencies reached an agreement are not material for the purposes of this present account. They have in them plenty of the pathetic humor so abundantly present in our war-labor administration. The agencies whose names are attached to the accompanying document finally agreed (October 14, 1918) on the formulation which was sent to the Secretary of Labor and by him transmitted to the President.

#### REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE COMMITTEE OF NATIONAL LABOR-ADJUSTMENT AGENCIES

The following recommendations are submitted to serve as a basis for a National Labor Policy to be announced by the President of the United States.

##### I. HARMONY OF ACTION BY LABOR-ADJUSTING AGENCIES

1. A Conference of National Labor Adjustment Agencies, composed of two representatives of each federal labor-adjusting agency, should be established to meet at regular intervals for the purpose of promoting unified action and stability in reference to matters under their jurisdiction. Effective methods shall be established by each agency for conference with such other agencies as may be directly concerned by a proposed award, and in no event shall a decision affecting a change in standard rates or working conditions theretofore fixed by an authorized governmental agency be deemed to be concluded, nor shall such award be promulgated until the Conference is first consulted as to its effect upon the industrial situation of the entire country.

2. It is recommended that appropriate steps be directed to be taken to secure whatever modification of existing agreements creating labor-adjustment agencies is necessary to enforce the national labor policy that may be declared by the President.

3. Any complaint as to the application or operation of the principles and standards herein proclaimed shall be referred to the National War Labor Board for adjudication, in so far as its jurisdiction applies. And nothing herein is intended to repeal or amend the provisions of the Presidential Proclamation of April 8, 1918, establishing the National War Labor Board, and fixing its jurisdiction, its general procedure, and the principles upon which its action and decisions should be based.

##### II. STANDARD OF WAGES AND WORKING CONDITIONS

The following industrial standards should govern the various adjusting agencies for the purpose of securing maximum efficiency during the war, regularity of work on the part of the employe, continuity of employment on the part of the employer, and to secure stability for industry. All the provisions should be interpreted with these great ends in view.

1. *Differentials.*—The principle of wage differentials relating to emergency war construction, shipyards, loading and unloading of ships, general